

*Cost of Living*

food prices review board. The government ignored that recommendation and did not bring in special legislation. Instead, they used an existing statute, the Inquiries Act, which conveniently circumvented parliament; they did not have to come before parliament with a special act. Many of the recommendations in the first report of the committee have been largely ignored by the government. Let me give an example. Recommendation No. 5 in the first report recommended that the federal government, in co-operation with various provincial governments, consider the feasibility of co-sponsored programs to get proper food on the tables of people with low incomes.

**Mr. Lalonde:** What about the first four recommendations?

**Mr. McGrath:** A 3.2 per cent increase in the cost of food in one month, or 16.2 per cent in one year, particularly affects families with lower incomes. Most of the other recommendations of the committee—and I can announce them one by one—have been ignored by the government, so much so that the second report of the committee called upon the government to proceed immediately with the implementation of the recommendations in the first report. That has been largely ignored. We can only come to the conclusion that this government is not serious about food prices. It refuses to present to the House and to the country a program that would deal seriously with this very critical problem.

Today we have high unemployment, high inflation and rising food prices, and the best that the government can do is the ad hoc, piecemeal program which it presented to the House on September 4. Nobody quarrels with these measures. As a matter of fact, they received the unanimous support of the House. Certainly it is desirable to do something to hold the price of milk in Canada. We hope and pray that this measure will be effective, although it is questionable whether it will have the desired results. Certainly it is difficult to understand how the government can implement the program in certain areas of the country, including my own province, where there are no milk marketing boards.

So far as the other approach of the government to this problem is concerned, namely, the subsidy for miller's wheat, we know what happened to that. That has gone the same way as the budget brought down in the House by the Minister of Finance on February 19, when he said:

I want to relieve the Canadian taxpayer of as much of this burden of rising prices as I can. And, in particular, I want to provide relief to that group of our citizens who are least equipped to fight rising prices—our lowest income earners.

I submit that the figures released today by Statistics Canada are alarming to the point where the situation requires extraordinary measures on the part of the government. Food for the home in one month increased by 3.2 per cent, or a yearly increase of 16.2 per cent. Dairy products are up .5 per cent, for a yearly increase of 8.5 per cent. Meat is up 8.2 per cent in one month, or a yearly increase of 27.9 per cent. Prices have reached such critical proportions that many of the people of this country cannot even afford to buy hamburger. Poultry products have increased in one month by 7.6 per cent, or an increase of

[Mr. McGrath.]

39.9 per cent for the year. Eggs have gone up by 13.4 per cent, for a yearly increase of 46.3 per cent.

It is just a short while ago that the government introduced a program in the house, a million dollar program whereby they were going to pay poultry farmers to kill their egg-producing hens so as to reduce the egg-producing capability of this country. What is the result of that program? The result is that we have had in one month a 13.4 per cent increase in the price of eggs.

**An hon. Member:** What about fish?

**Mr. McGrath:** I am glad the hon. member mentioned fish, because among the lowest income earners in this country are the fishermen in eastern Canada. They are the ones who are really suffering from these rising prices.

**Mr. Lalonde:** And you want to freeze them.

**Mr. McGrath:** The world price of fish has gone up so that today the Americans are paying 70 cents a pound for our fish, but the price to our fishermen has hardly moved—they are getting 9 cents a pound for their fish. These are the fishermen who have to pay inflated prices for eggs. They have to pay inflated prices for beef and inflated prices for poultry products. The low income earners of this country, of whom the fishermen of eastern Canada are the most prominent, are the ones who are suffering most—but this government does nothing about it.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McGrath:** Somebody asked, "What about freezing prices?" This party has never advocated freezing prices for the low income earners in this country.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. McGrath:** If the government had accepted the policy advocated by this party in February of this year, we would not have these inflated prices for food. We would not have a 16.2 per cent increase in food in one year. We would not have a 3.2 per cent increase in one month.

I hope that the hon. members who have made the supreme sacrifice of staying away from the Chateau Laurier to sit in the House for this emergency debate will participate on their feet, instead of making stupid interjections from their seats.

**Some hon. Members:** Order.

**Mr. McGrath:** The trouble is that this government has failed to bring before the House policies that would adequately deal with runaway prices and with unemployment. That is why Your Honour granted the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) this emergency debate tonight, and that is why parliament has set aside its regular business to debate this most serious crisis facing the country. I submit that while the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices has done very good work and has heard many witnesses, it cannot be the answer because, as we made plain in the House at the time of the setting up of the committee, we objected to its setting up because the terms of reference were too narrow.